



Kayaking through Pendleton/10C



Mastering teriyaki sauce/4C



Westminster best in show/9C



Ham radio operators all over the state took part in the Cascade Rising emergency radio drill on Tuesday. Ham radio operators will be a vital communication asset to the state in the case of a catastrophic Cascade Subduction Zone earthquake.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



Umatilla County Emergency Manager Jack Remillard, left, checks in with ham radio operators Alan Polan and Don Drayton during the Cascade Rising emergency radio drill Tuesday in Pendleton.

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Don Drayton keyed the mic Tuesday morning in the radio room at the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office in Pendleton.

"W7OEM, W7OEM, this is KC7RWC," he said, trying to contact the Oregon Office of Emergency Management's amateur radio unit — W7OEM — and signaling he was broadcasting from the Amateur Radio Emergency Service unit, or ARES (pronounce it like Aries, the Zodiac sign).

No response.

He tried again, and again nothing. Drayton is the Morrow County ARES emergency coordinator. Alan Polan is his Umatilla County counterpart. He used a radio to send an email over the Internet and air waves to others in the area participating in the latest Cascadia Rising radio drill.

More than an hour later, a faint, mechanical voice from the state's emergency management office squeaked from the transceiver radio. The drill was indeed in full swing throughout Oregon.

Amateur radio operators — or hams — will have a serious role to fill when the big Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake hits. The quake will topple power poles and phone lines, knock around cellphone and Internet towers. Even in Eastern Oregon, hundreds of miles away from the quake's center, aftershocks will disrupt daily life. Move a microwave tower a few degrees, and that cellphone call goes nowhere fast. When those typical modes of communications fail, you are not calling anyone for days, maybe weeks.

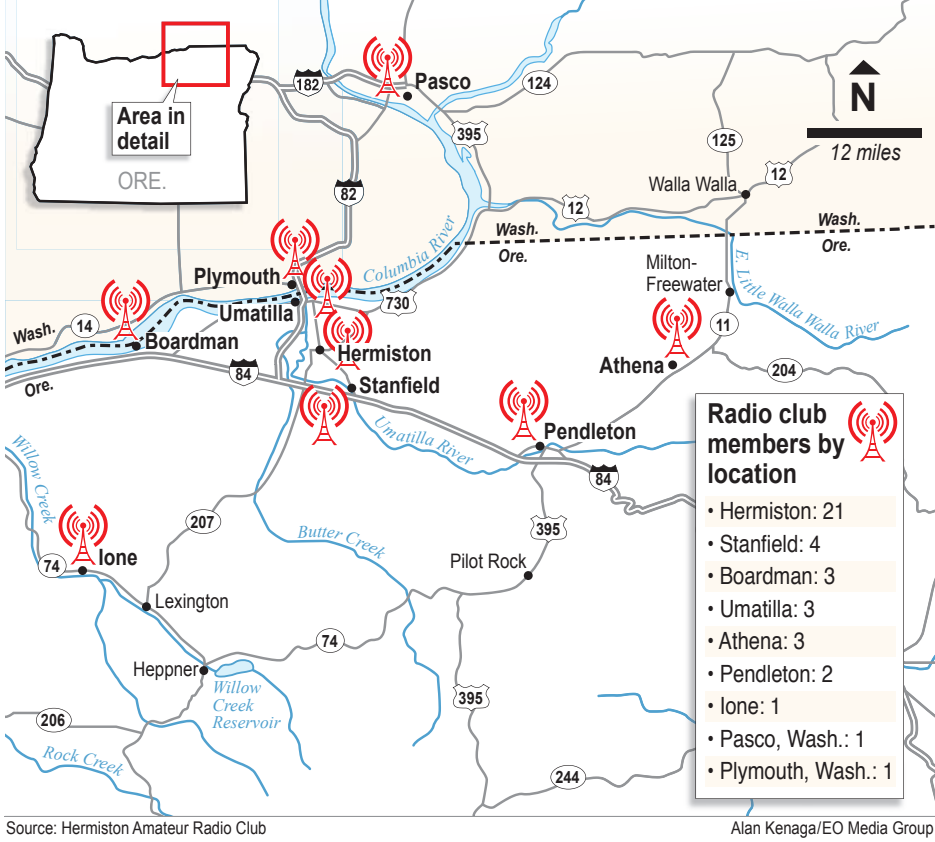
But the hams will.

Lynn Wilson of Athena, call sign W7LW, said ham radio's success is in its independence from other communication infrastructure. A radio, antenna and power source — and the federal license to operate — are all a ham needs to send and receive.

"We're up and going," he said. "We're up and going hours, days, before anyone else is ready."

Weather, the time of day and sun spot activity can interfere with radio communications, but Polan (KE4TRR) said hams delivered emergency messages in New York City during 9/11 and helped govern-

Hermiston Amateur Radio Club



ment agencies in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Through ARES, he said, hams provide backup emergency communications at the county level.

If, however, disaster befell the radio station at the sheriff's office, Polan said the Oregon Department of Transportation in Pendleton keeps a trailer with radio and communication gear, one of 12 "strategic technical reserves" throughout Oregon.

Wilson and Polan are members of the Hermiston Amateur Radio Club, and Drayton (AA7DD) is the club president. The club counts 39 members in all, some as far away as Pasco and Lone, but that was as of early 2015. The club helps with communications during some local events, including the annual Umatilla County Fair parade. Preparing for Cascadia, though, has become a common topic at club meetings.

Club vice-president Jeff Sak (KJ7MI)

said he urges members to practice "tactical voice comps," such as speaking with a phonetic alphabet when giving a call sign. Hams in the U.S. have to give their call sign in English every 10 minutes when they broadcast, he said, and the more they practice phrases such as "Kilo Charlie seven Romeo Whiskey Charlie," the more likely they are to be clear in their communications. And that, he said, is going to matter in an emergency.

Polan said the ARES leadership put an emphasis on local organizations to drill and improve skills so they could work effectively in a four-day Federal Emergency Management Agency exercise in June.

But being a ham, Sak and Polan said, is not all about public service and serious preparations. Sak said folks interested in amateur radio are the sort that like to figure out how things work, so it is a good fit

Hams and the Big One

When the Cascadia quake hits, ham radios will be the backbone of communication



Morrow County Emergency Coordinator Don Drayton checks email addresses with Emergency Management Administrative Aide Jodi Florence during the Cascade Rising emergency radio drill Tuesday in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Want to know more?

Alan Polan and Don Drayton are looking for more people with amateur radio licenses to join their Amateur Radio Emergency Service unit, or ARES. If you are interested in joining ARES for Umatilla County, contact Polan at his email: ke4trr@bmi.net. If you are interested in joining ARES for Morrow County, contact Drayton at his email: dfdrayton@hotmail.com. You also can visit www.oregonares-races.org to learn more.

Polan works for the National Weather Service, which uses the Amateur Radio Network in its mission to help protect people and property. If you want to know more about Skywarn or become a Skywarn member, Polan is the man to contact.

And if you are interesting in becoming an amateur radio operator, you can find more information from the American Radio Relay League at www.arrl.org or check out the league's Northwest Division at www.nwarrl.wetnet.net.

for tinkers. And Wilson and others said they get a kick out of talking with people hundreds and even thousands of miles away.

"I was chatting with a guy in Scotland," Wilson said, "while I was making my eggs."

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